



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Steve Goldstein (O) 202-343-6416

(H) 202-887-5248

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES KESTERSON MITIGATION PLAN

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, today unveiled a proposal for the long-term mitigation of California's Kesterson Reservoir which not only provides for full replacement of habitat values, but will also almost triple the wetlands acreage in the area.

The mitigation plan, which represents a joint state-federal commitment to habitat acquisition and wetlands enhancement, provides both mitigation of habitat values and wetland acres lost at Kesterson as well as additional wetlands consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. When fully implemented, the Kesterson mitigation plan will result in the protection and enhancement of 6,239 acres of currently unprotected wetlands, plus the development of 4,464 new wetland acres. The Kesterson Reservoir is located north of Los Banos, California near the San Joaquin River.

Announcing the proposal, Lujan said, "With this proposed mitigation and enhancement effort, we will be turning what was once regarded as an environmental nightmare into a model of environmental responsiveness. Through cooperation with the State of California, we will be creating substantially more wildlife and waterfowl habitat than was originally lost to contamination at Kesterson. This plan will allow us to not only repair the damage that was done, but also make a major contribution toward the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan."

The proposal, developed by the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game, will be submitted to California's Regional Water Quality Control Board on Monday, November 27, 1989.

The goal was to provide for no net loss of wetlands acreage consistent with California state policy, and no loss of wildlife values. The plan greatly exceeds the requirements for mitigation. Although only 1,283 acres of wetlands were lost from the closure of Kesterson Reservoir, the plan will provide for the creation of 4,464 acres of new wetlands and protect an additional 6,239 acres of existing wetlands. The 23,000 acre acquisition in this plan will create a significantly increased habitat for wildlife. Another provision includes supplying 62,000 acre-feet of water so these wetlands can serve as models of ecological productivity.

"These measures stand as an example of how we can improve our world and leave it a better place than we found it," stated Lujan.